

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

RADON

A CRITICAL CONSUMER SAFETY ISSUE BY

HON. NANCY HARVEY STEORTS

National Safety Expert

**Former Chairman, U.S. Consumer Product Safety
Commission**

Author, "Your Home Safe Home"

President, Nancy Harvey Steorts and Associates

PRESENTED AT THE

EPA Region 3 RADON STAKEHOLDERS MEETING

Hosted by the Virginia Department of Health

Fredericksburg, VA

APRIL 23, 2014

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It is indeed an honor and a privilege to be invited to participate in the EPA Region 3 Stakeholder's Meeting on Radon which has been hosted by the Virginia Department of Health. I compliment each of the stakeholders for your participation in this important safety issue and I appreciate all of the work each of you have done and are doing to alleviate this very serious problem of Radon in today's homes, schools and buildings. I want to personally thank Ryan Paris, Radon Coordinator, Virginia Department of Health, Office of Radiological Health for all of his very important work with Radon, and for helping me develop a very important radon initiative in Northern Virginia, which I will discuss with you a little later in my presentation.

Safety of each home and building has been extremely important to me, and I have worked diligently throughout my career to bring national, regional, and local awareness to each safety issue I have tackled. I have worked with several of the departments and agencies that are part of this conference, on several of these issues, and totally appreciated all of your support.

CONSUMER PERSPECTIVE ON RADON

Let's first take a look at this issue from the consumer perspective. Consumers ask: What is radon? Where does it come from? Is it really a problem? What effect does it have on me, on my family and my Home? How do I find someone to alleviate it, or can I do it myself? How do I know, if it really can be removed completely? What kind of testing and remediation needs to be done? Are there standards for the inspectors and remediators? How am I sure once they remediate it, it will not return? What medical issues could develop if there is Radon in your home?

These are questions that consumers, homeowners and renters of homes are asking today, as well as parents of school children, and employees working in buildings throughout the country.

Most consumers are not knowledgeable about RADON, unless they know someone who may have had a problem, which was caused by Radon. When purchasing or selling a home today, most sellers and buyers are totally unaware of Radon, and are very surprised if a Radon test is recommended, much less a radon remediation.

U.S. CONSUMER PRODUCT SAFETY COMMISSION

As a National Consumer Safety Advocate, and as the former Chairman of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission let me tell you how I became involved in this issue, and other indoor quality issues related to the Safety of one's Home, which may help you better understand my point of view on this important issue.

CPSC is the federal government agency, as many of you know, who has regulatory authority over 15,000 generic products and issues related to the home. Many of these products have caused thousands of consumer injuries, medical problems and fatalities.....many of which could have been prevented, if consumers only knew about the potential problem, and were aware of a potential safety remedy.

When I was Chairman of CPSC, after reports of thousands of injuries and lost property from fires, we brought smoke detectors to the marketplace.

Cooperating with the National Fire Protection Association, and fire departments throughout the country we were able to bring national awareness to the millions of fires throughout the country, and with the addition of a smoke detector in each home, lives and property were saved, when the instant sound of the smoke detector alerted the homeowner, that there was a potential fire . Today, 97% of homes have smoke detectors. Another silent killer carbon monoxide was killing thousands of people, and with the addition of a carbon monoxide detectors, and an effective home inspection program, we were able to again save thousands of lives/injuries. The introduction of Ground –fault circuit interrupters was another program we initiated which again protected millions of families from an unnecessary electrocution. Lead-based paint is another issue we tackled, and because of the regulations on this issue, lead-based incidents and deaths were greatly decreased. This initiative was done in cooperation with EPA. Each of the above initiatives was done in cooperation with industry groups, and consumers, and involved an intensive media and public relations effort, which stimulated consumers to understand that these safety issues were very important. Consumers learned that they needed to pay attention, to what the corrective action program was which could save their lives and their property.

I bring these issues to your attention, because I know personally and professionally, what can happen when government, industry and consumers can work together to alleviate a major consumer safety problem.

RADON IS A SAFETY ISSUE

Today, as I look at the RADON issue, we know that RADON is a major SAFETY ISSUE. The United States Surgeon General has warned that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer, and is responsible for 21,000 lung cancers deaths a year. THIS is HORRIBLE! We all know, in this room, that this can be changed. We all know, that if the homes of today had a RADON CHECK, that it could be corrected with remediation if only the homeowners were aware of it. We also know that today's consumers are very energy concerned, and in many cases they tightly seal their homes to conserve energy, which keeps today's homes buttoned up tight, so that nothing gets out. Yes, Radon which is trapped inside a home can affect

every home, regardless where it is located. Radon, can also be a cause of a very life-debilitating disease, if it is not discovered by testing and remediated. RADON MUST be a Safety Priority, which I know you all know, and you are trying to do something extremely positive to alleviate the problem.

WHAT DO WE DO?

Back, when I was Chairman of CPSC, we worked on many of the above issues, related to the home, specifically air quality issues. After we had found a solution to the problem, working with the industry to come up with a solution, I knew, that we needed to put a major focus on IMPLEMENTATION of the solution to the problem. We needed to have a major focus on communication of the problem and the solutions present to alleviate the issue, and then communicate this directly to consumers. It was with that thought, that I figured the most direct way to reach the consumer in the home was through 3rd parties, “their realtors”, who had sold them their home, or were in the process of selling them a new home.

Thus, I went to the National Association of Realtors with a proposal to help the CPSC implement some of our home safety programs. At the time, we were banning urea foam insulation, we were promoting smoke detectors, we were concerned about the lead paint issue, and we were recommending home inspections. All good programs, but the consumers needed to know about them at the very local level, and that was in their homes. THE NAR said yes, they would help us, and we worked together diligently to develop programs that would work effectively.

We, were able to get the Realtors to put disclosure of urea formaldehyde on the official sales contract, a lead-based paint document was included in the sales contract which had to be signed by all parties, with information specifically related to any home built prior to 1978 which could have had lead paint. The condition of and disclosure of many other home inspection items were added to the sales contract as well. Training on these issues was done, by the realtors, and their associations in cooperation with the CPSC. The individual realtor, came in contact with both sellers and buyers, and were very helpful in getting the message of safety to their clients.

Radon, however, like the other effective safety initiatives needs an intensive media and public relations effort which addresses the seriousness of the problem and the effectiveness of the remediation.

WHY MY INTEREST IN RADON?

I am now back in the real estate industry, as I wanted to see what is happening at the local level to many of the safety issues related to the home. Was the realtor involved as a Safety Advocate? Was the homeowner concerned about the safety issues in their home, or were they more concerned about the location, the interior, and the schools? Were the realtor trade associations interested in addressing new issues related to safety, or was this not on their radar screen?

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A REALTOR WITH RADON

It happened that one of my early very successful sales was with a beautiful home situated in a beautiful wooded area in McLean, Va. These owners did everything in their power to make their lovely home presentable to the potential buyers. Everything was in place for a successful sale; multiple offers came in within 3 days. What the owners did not realize, however, was that there was a radon problem. In order to make the offers work, a radon remediation was necessary. These owners had no knowledge of radon, so depended on my advice and recommendations. I found the most professional, qualified and certified inspectors, as well as the most qualified and certified remediation firm, who took time to explain Radon, explained carefully what was going to be done, and what the intended results would be. The remediation of the radon was done extremely well. The sale was consummated, and the happy sellers had a sold home. Being the responsible homeowners that they were, however, they also informed all of their neighbors and friends about their radon remediation experience. Each of the then alarmed neighbors used the same radon remediator to take care of their new-found radon problem, and were so very grateful for the very sound information, and the ability to have their homes now free from RADON..

Another RADON experience was very different, however.. These buyers had looked at over 40 homes in Northern Virginia, and had not moved for over 25 years. This was to be a MOVE-UP home, so they were extremely

particular in what they were going to buy. Finally, we found the perfect home....An offer was made, with all kind of contingencies including a contingency for a radon inspection. The RADON inspection was conducted and came in just under 10 picocuries per liter of air. This owner of this house was not knowledgeable about RADON, although her husband had died several years before of a respiratory disease. I had called the Radon remediator, I had used in the first house several years before, to educate my buyer as to what needed to be done because the home had multi-levels. The remediator designed the systems , stating it might need 2 systems because of the multi levels. The proposal was presented to the owner, but she and her agent decided on another remediation company, which was much cheaper. Their system was put in, and the final testing came back at 4 picocuries per liter of air after the remediation. Knowing that this would not be acceptable to my buyers, I contacted the remediator, who had done the owners work, and he said, "well, what did you think, I remediated what she, the home seller wanted, which was only for 1/3 of the house, as that is all she authorized me to do. NEEDLESS TO SAY, THIS WAS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO THE BUYER. I called my original remediator out again, to assess the situation, and he said, it would definitely take 2 systems to remediate this home, due to the multi-levels, as the one system did not do the job effectively. The seller now had a problem, that would need to be disclosed, yet she would not cooperate, nor would her agent who was clueless about the radon issue.

After much discussion, this was going nowhere. I decided to have the original remediator I called redo the work, and remediate the house from radon, which he did, at my expense. Now, the new owners my buyers, are in a radon-remediated home, extremely pleased and safe in their new home.

I told the owner and buyer that this would NEVER happen again, as I was going to see that there would be changes in the radon inspection and remediation requirements in Northern Virginia, as I was then on the Board of Directors of the Northern Va. Association of Realtors, and would initiate some changes that would address this very important safety issue.

NORTHERN VIRGINIA ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS:

At the time, this had happened, The Standards Committee of NVAR was working on improving and updating our Standards forms for Home Inspection and Radon Inspection. The Standards Committee was submitting both forms to the NVAR BOARD OF DIRECTORS, of which I was a member, at the time for approval. Because of the very serious issue I had just gone through with the unwilling seller, related to Radon remediation, I recommended to the BOARD, that the RADON Standard be sent back to the Standards Committee for further review and update, changes and clarification. I also recommended that I be invited to the new Standards Committee meeting to update them on this very important safety issue. Fortunately, my request was granted, and I was invited to bring another expert with me, if I chose.

It was then that I researched who was the best expert to review the RADON ISSUE, and who could accompany me to recommend important changes to the Radon Form to the Standards Committee for NVAR. Ryan Paris, Radon Coordinator of the Health Department of the State of Virginia was highly recommended to me, and he consented to come to Northern Va. to present the issue of RADON, and his recommendations for how to handle it, to the NVAR Standards Committee. The Committee was shocked, when they learned how serious of an issue, this was to homeowners, as well as to their own homes. Ryan was extremely knowledgeable, and gave an outstanding presentation to each of the members. Not only did the Standards Committee accept each of Ryan Paris's recommendations, but I also recommended to the BOD, that we have Ryan conduct a continuing education program on RADON for the membership of NVAR. As a result, the BOD accepted by unanimous consent a changed radon inspection form, which is now in effect as of Jan. 1. 2014. This has resulted in many real estate offices and settlement companies conducting training on the new form.

Without my prior knowledge of RADON as a safety issue, and my prior success that I had working with the Realtor's Associations, this would have never happened. We are all very grateful to Ryan Paris for his knowledge, his presentation, and the CE Course he had developed on Radon, that had all ready been approved by the State of Virginia. This is an excellent example of the outstanding type of support one can achieve,

when industry, government and consumers work together for the benefit of all concerned.

WHO NOW NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE RADON ISSUE?

- 1. Every homeowner and renter in the country.**
- 2. Every Realtor and Mortgage Company that works with sellers and buyers of Homes today.**
- 3. All realtor's associations who set standards for the sale and purchases of today's Homes.**
- 4. All builders of homes, schools, and buildings.**

Today's homeowners are not knowledgeable about all the safety aspects of their homes. They think "it" will never happen to me. I will never have a fire. My child will never get asthma, my family will never be poisoned by carbon monoxide, nor will a member of my family ever die from a gas called RADON. the 2nd greatest cause of lung cancer.

Once the public becomes aware of RADON, like they became aware of Smoke Detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, lead based paint and other safety issues, RADON will become a "must inspect" item in everyone's home.

IN CONCLUSION: MY RECOMMENDATIONS TO YOU::: RADON SHAREHOLDERS

- 1. Every Home MUST be tested for RADON by a CERTIFIED Inspector.**
- 2. All inspectors must be Certified and bonded in order to perform a test. Inspectors should take time to educate the homeowner about radon and the necessity of using proper testing procedures**
- 3. All RADON LAB Tests should be performed at certified LABS for RADON.**
- 4. Test results should be reported directly to the homeowner by the Inspectors and be given an explanation of remediation procedures. Testers should NOT Remediate, but should know the procedures.**
- 4. Homeowners should select a certified, bonded, highly qualified remediation firm to do the remediation. Remediation should be clearly explained to the homeowner, and a potential purchaser. Results after radon remediation should BE BELOW recommended EPA**

recommendation of 4 picocuries per liter of air, or it may be necessary to put in 2 systems.

5. Retesting of REMEDIATION should be done by a certified Inspector NOT connected to the REMEDIATION FIRM.

6. If potential purchaser is concerned about the retest results, the purchaser should have the property retested by another Certified Inspector of the Purchaser's choosing.

7. Radon industry should work with the real estate industry throughout the country to bring to the attention of real estate industry the seriousness of the RADON issue, and why it is important to work together to resolve this issue.

8. Realtors must be educated as to the importance of RADON as a SAFETY ISSUE IN THE HOME. What happens in the interior of the HOME is of critical importance to each member of the family and can affect the safety of every individual in the home, school and buildings they inhabit.

Radon is a very serious issue in today's homes. I want to compliment the EPA and the industry working on this important issue for all of the work that you have all ready done to bring solid information to the consumer. Getting safety information to consumers can sometimes be a challenge. As the Author, of 3 books on Safety, I find that when consumers hear the stories of what can happen to them, if they do not observe the issues of safety, they are quickly changing their focus and becoming much more safety conscious

It has been a pleasure speaking to each of you today. Thank you for all you are doing to make our homes and building safer. I look forward to working with you, on this critical issue.

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